

Iron County Register

BY ELI D. AKE.
IRONTON, MISSOURI

ON THE BRIDGE.

It was young Robin and his love
Stood on a bridge at even song;
Night's countless lamps were lit above;
Below, the streamlet slid along.
Across the rail she lightly leant,
And gazed into the quiet stream,
Which in the moon's reflected gleam,
But never stars shone half as bright
As those that summer night.

Around her taper waist an arm—
Her radiant form gently lay;
In place and hour there lurked a charm
That owned no kinship to the day.
Familiar sounds upon the gale
Were softly wafted to the ear,
And from the darkness of the vale
The love-tones of the night were clear.
But sweeter than the song he sung,
The words that trembled on her tongue.

The shadows deepen in the dell;
Weird bats hover the water play;
And on the distant breezes swell
The village church-bells far away.
Through all the windings of the glade,
The stately trees, like phantoms stand;
Whispering Love was leading man and maid
Far onward into fairyland;
And neither had on earth a part,
Save only in the other's heart.

Anon, from yonder wooded ridge,
The cold moon climbs the blue expanse,
She glorifies the rustic bridge,
Her beams upon the brooklet dance;
She softly winds about the twin
The radiance of her liquid light,
As though, for lovers, she would fain
Create a fairer day from night.
Her silver signet—nothing loth—
She sets upon their pledged troth!

—Chambers Journal.

"ONE OF THREE."

BY JESSE POTTERHILL,
author of "Probation," "The Wolf," etc.

"Here are three breast-knots," said a wise man to a maiden who was passing his hut. "Choose quickly which you will wear through life."
The maiden looked at the knots, and took one of them up. "I will keep this, and wear it," she said.
"Why that?" asked the sage. "True, it is not the worst. This tinsel affair would have given you no more satisfaction; but it is not the best. This with the tiny diamond in its folds is the best. The one you have chosen has but a little steel button with a sharp point, sometimes you will hurt yourself with it. Take rather the third—this with the diamond."
"I will have this," said the girl, clinging to her first choice.
"But why?"
"Because I like it the best."
"Why so?"
"Because I do," answered the maiden, pinning the knot on to her breast, and going away singing.
The sage, with a cynical smile, withdrew into his hut.
"Always the same old tale," he muttered. "With man and maid alike, 'I like it best.' And why? 'Because I do!' It grows monotonous."

CHAPTER I.

MARGARET BARRINGTON.

It was a fine afternoon in the middle of May. The sun shone brightly into a light, large, gayly furnished room, evidently the boudoir or private sitting-room of a woman of means, if not of very cultivated taste. Cultivation, refinement, educated taste, were, indeed, most conspicuous by their absence from all the arrangements of this room. Everything in it looked as if it had cost a good deal of money, but there was everywhere an odd mixture of the vulgar and elegant—incongruities which here and there almost attained the relative heights of the sublime and the ridiculous. There was a velvet carpet, light in its general effect, brilliant and varied of hue; it had a dazzling blue ground, adorned with medallions of drab, more like tea-trays than anything else; garlanded with flowers of every hue, and of species both known and unknown to scientific classification. It was a carpet which would have caused a latter-day votary of blue and white china and neutral tints to tear his hair and wail aloud. It was the kind of carpet which challenged the beholder to ignore it if he could, with a triumphant consciousness that he could not. High artistic authorities inform us that the carpet should be the least striking thing in a room. In this case, it was the most striking one. Possibly that was the reason why its owner had chosen it. She was a person who did not love the beauty of reticence in any shape or form. This was abundantly testified, not only by the carpet already mentioned, but by all the rest of the furniture of the room. The hues were, in all cases where it was possible, lively, and so that monotony might not palp, they were varied. Colors and shapes and styles were massed together in a bold and daring way which had at least the merit of a defiant originality about it—an originality which defied conventional ideas of fitness.

One of the principal features in this room was the profusion of tables, little and big, which pervaded it. Just where the uninitiated visitor might reasonably have expected to find a free and open passage to the door, or the window, or the piano, there, without fail, would be planted some rickety, spindle-legged structure, covered with specimens of the latest and most grotesque China monster or Parisian gimmerack. (They were bought by the lady of the house as articles of vertu; it was her unreluctant son Tom, and his no less unreluctant ally, Margaret Barrington, who persisted in calling them gimmeracks.) They were a great nuisance to all her friends and ran away with a great deal of her pin-money, and were universally voted a bore; therefore, she clung to them with a fondness which only increased as the disfavor of others augmented.

She, Mrs. Robert Pierce, was, at this moment, in this bright afternoon, alone in the room—a stout, fair, matronly woman, young still, and only promising to be enormous, and unwieldy in figure some time. She was dressed in a kind of tea gown, which, with its frills and ribbons of blue, suited her. Her fair face wore a somewhat high color, and she threw herself back in a lounging chair, and closed her eyes, sighing wearily, and clasping her hands upon her knee.

"Oh," she murmured, half aloud, "is

everything ready, I wonder? I do wish he would come, and relieve my mind about that champagne. I know there's not enough in the house, and if we were to fall short at the last, good gracious!"

After a moment given to pondering on the dire possibility, she suddenly started up again in an agile manner, and pulled the bell. Then she said to the servant who answered her summons: "Bring some tea, and tell Miss Barrington that if she is at liberty I should like to speak to her."

With which she again sank into her chair and waited, her lips moving now and then, as if she mentally apostrophized some loved object. It was not so, however, as those who knew her would easily have surmised. Could her meditations have been heard, they would have run:

"I suppose I must trust to his remembering it, but men are so careless. Unless their wives look after them they really do behave like imbeciles in some things. Men and cooks—I don't know which are the worst."

Here a maid came in with the desired tea. While she was clearing one of the innumerable small tables before alluded to for its reception, the door was a second time opened, and a young lady entered, at whose appearance the exhausted looking matron in white and blue raised herself, and testified signs of renewed animation.

"Oh, here you are, Margaret! Come and have some tea. I don't know what you feel like, but I am so exhausted I feel as if I should never come round again. And I do think you might have helped me more."

"My dear Laura, you know this entertainment is against my principles in every way. How, therefore, could I help you without perjuring myself; and then, I know the more trouble such an affair gives you, the more you enjoy it."

"Well, considering that all the trouble is on your account—"

"But not at my desire, my dear. I am sure you will not maintain that I asked you to give a ball for my coming of age. Why, when people are one and twenty, should they go and advertise the melancholy fact aloud to all their ill-natured acquaintances, who would always have a hold upon them in after years, when perhaps they would be glad enough to appear young? It is simply giving all the gossipers you know a handle when they want to say ill-natured things."

"Pooh! Stuff! Some people may want to conceal their age. Helmses never mind. Oh, but tea is truly refreshing. Do take some!"

"Thank you," said Margaret Barrington, with an odd little smile as she poured a cupful of the beverage out, and carrying it to the bay window, stood in that recess, and looked out while she drank it.

She was a considerable heiress, and a great many people said she was a beauty. This day she attained her majority, and entered upon full and uncontrolled possession of her fortune and property. Margaret's mother had died at the girl's birth. Her father had taken no second wife, and she had lost him when she was thirteen years old. She and he had been alone in the world, so far as having any near relations went. Mrs. Pierce was Margaret's own cousin, though many years older than herself. She had been Miss Cathcart, poor and pretty, and she had at an early age married Robert Pierce, a rich manufacturer of a great city, whose money was abundant, if his family was doubtful. To him—Mr. Pierce—and his wife, the guardianship of the young heiress had been assigned, not because the late Mr. Barrington considered them the most desirable persons to bring up a young girl—not because he liked their style, or their friends, or their mode of life, but because Laura Pierce was, and because, with all her follies, she was a kind-hearted woman, and because Mr. Pierce, if not a gentleman, in Mr. Barrington's sense of the word, was also a kindly natured man, and away from his home, where he was indulgent to weakness, was a keen, shrewd man of business, and honest withal—who would take care of Margaret's money as if it were his own.

Stringent provisions for the education of the young lady were made in her father's will; she had, to use Mrs. Pierce's plaintive expression, "enjoyed every advantage" which the best schools, the first masters, the most accomplished mistresses, could give. She had passed with honor examinations bristling with difficulties; she had imbibed an immense amount of condensed science, condensed art, condensed theory of music, general facts, music and languages. She had never been allowed to go out alone; she had been taken to hear the most celebrated singers and musicians, to lectures, to concerts, to literary and scientific tournaments; she had been strictly kept aloof from anything like woman's rights on the one hand, and a vulgar flirtation on the other. With the best intentions in the world, her pastors and masters had employed every energy to make her into a model young lady—a model in a social, a domestic, a benevolent point of view. The Established Church had seen after her morals and religious belief; she had "learned" political economy, because she would some day have an estate to manage; many other things had been done to improve and make her what she ought to be.

And with what result? The result that when, at nineteen years of age, she was committed into the hands of her guardian and his wife as a finished young lady, it was found that all her training had not spoiled her; that all her efforts to prevent her from deciding for herself on many matters; that had not made her less incorrigibly natural and outspoken. She did not altogether believe in the Church of England. She said she did not understand Wagner's music. She said she thought there was a great deal of truth in what the woman's rights ladies said for themselves. She said she did not see any harm in a flirtation. She said she did not believe that her first duty was to be sure she married a man who would look after her money and take care of her. She said she was not going to marry any one at all until long after she was twenty-one—until she had tried whether she could not look after her money for herself. She said many other things of a like nature, not loudly, but with a very soft, delightful voice, and with a smile at once soft and bright. Moreover, she said she did not care

much about girls, and she thought it must be because she had never known anything but girls. She had no special friend to whom she wrote daily half a ream of paper, and called it a letter. She had struck up a great friendship with Master Thomas Pierce, the eldest hope of her guardian, and Laura, his wife. Thomas and his sisters adored her. She had early gained from Mr. Pierce the sobriquet of "The Incongruous," and he had called her by it ever since.

Yet Margaret, as she stood in the window, silently sipping her tea, and so allowing me time for this long digression, did not look a very incorrigible person, or a very bad person in any way. Indeed, one was particularly struck with the womanly softness of all her traits—a softness tempered by a certain fire, but which never for a moment disappeared. She was indisputably a beautiful creature; tall, and formed on the lines of a Juno rather than of a Hebe, none of her features, taken separately, could be called handsome; but the *total ensemble* was charming. When she smiled, a sunny, generous smile, one quite forgot that her face was more broad than oval; one pardoned the irregular shape of her nose, because no other nose would have been suited to the rest of her face; and there was no possibility of disputing the beauty of her red-gold hair, of the true Titianesque hue, or of the curious, luminous, golden-brown eyes, which were enthusiastic, but neither dreamy nor shortsighted. 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